

Advent 1
November 29, 2009
Fr. Bill McGinty

"47 Years Ago"

Forty-seven years ago, the whole college assembled in the front hall of our school. It had a staircase straight out of "*Gone With The Wind*." At the top of the stairwell hung an Advent wreath. The whole of the choir, the faculty and the student body were packed into this hall, as the Cantor or evening vespers intoned: "Regem Ventorum Domumnicem and we replied: Venite Adoreneus."

"The Lord is coming as King; let us go forth to adore him." It is the message of Advent; it is the voice of the herald proclaiming the coming of a Messiah, the first gleaming light of a brand new Kingdom.

Advent speaks to us in symbols-Kings, stars, Wiseman, prophets, prophecies and much more. Evil Kings worked Empires and when it does, we depict it, in our minds, in picture images, Joseph and Mary, Kings setting out on a journey; the story unravels for us each year like a multi colored tapestry.

Forty-seven Advents later, we light the first of our Advent candles once again, knowing that we live in a vastly different world. The Cold War has ended, Vietnam came and went, the iron curtain fell and Apartheid ended, wars and assassinations continued, yet nothing has dimmed this story of human kind's salvation. Oh, we still have poverty and the poor among us' famine still exists in Africa; we still manage to pollute the planet; but in those forty-seven years, incredible things have happened to all of us. For this Advent story, has had an effect on all our lives. Advent re-focuses our attention, as Christians, each year on the coming of Christ and what he has done for each of us in our lives.

Advent language in the readings today speaks of promise, joy, faith, love and heart. They are all words that we can so easily use of Marianne and Jim Shugrue today as they celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary, "promise, joy, faith, love and heart."

For back in 1969, while conservatives were landing Richard Nixon, the new president, as possibly the greatest president of the 20th century, and liberals were portending they were having a great time in the mud of Woodstock, Jimmy and Marianne were getting married. In those 40 years presidents have come and gone, Nelson Mandela got out of jail after 27 years, the Berlin Wall fell down, Marianne and Jim are still married, still caring for those they love and their friends.

They are like the Advent story in that they are unchanging. They are always kind, helpful, generous, optimistic and loyal. None of that has anything to do with the fact that they are not from this planet. Yes, they are fans of Star Trek, Star Wars, Dr. Who and the time space continuum. And yes, that is why Jimmy has the annoying habit of knowing everything, especially stuff most of us don't want to know, or being right 99.9 % of the time. But if truth be

told, they are for all of us, the greatest examples of what human beings should be. They are dedicated. They have deep values. They love family. They love America and they are conservative. God has an important place in their lives. That is six out of six. That is why today they are celebrating 40 years of marriage, 40 years of building a family, 40 years of friendships that have endured, 40 years of caring for the sick and aging relatives, and 40 years of being followers of Jesus Christ. Throw in two children who embody everything that Jim and Marianne stand for, and are greatest of people in their own right, Robert and Sharon, and you know that today we have something to truly celebrate in Jim and Marianne.

The coming of Jesus as Messiah is a transforming experience for our world. Jesus changes things and he changes people. One day Marianne was coming off a shift in the Cardiology Unit at the hospital as she went to pass the Operating Theater she came across a man lying on a gurney; he was fearful lying there waiting to be wheeled in for his operation. Marianne stopped to talk with him. "Are you afraid?" She asked, "Yes" he replied.

Marianne took his hand and said: "Would you like me to pray with you?"

"Yes, please" he replied. And there in a busy hospital hallway, she laid hands on him and prayed with him to the Lord.

Ten years ago, Jim was in a terrible road accident on Kings Highway in Warwick. His legs, wrist, shoulder blade and head were all broken. We went to see him in Westchester Hospital where he lay with tubes and braces, IV's and splints. His first words to us were: "Do not make me laugh."